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## Retail Design Rules & Guidelines



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## Introduction

The ideas behind “Three Foot Marketing” provide a helpful introduction to the importance of store planning and design. Research has shown that up to 75% of product purchasing decisions are made in the store, and of those, all are made within the last three feet. Customers may have shopping plans in mind, but once inside, their decision making can be influenced in a number of different ways. Regardless of whether you provide goods, services, or both, understanding these influences and the behaviour of your customers will allow you to make smart decisions about the design of your store and keep you on the right track.

## Retail Design & Foot Traffic Optimization

The purpose of retail design is not just to make your store pretty. The goal is to create an environment that attracts customers, makes them comfortable and appeals to their values, and encourages them to purchase. While seemingly difficult, there are many proven strategies that can be used to help improve your customer’s experience and generate more sales for your business.

Some of the areas in your store are more important than others - think of them as prime real estate. Understanding where these areas are and how to maximize their potential is critical to success and increased sales. This guide will take a brief look at many of the strategies for improving your store’s retail design.

## 1. First Impressions

Curb appeal matters. Customers will make a list of judgement about your business before ever setting foot in the door. Good in-store layouts can still fail to attract customers if the store front has poor curb appeal. Make sure that you're making a positive first impression that conveys something about your business and brand.

- Invest in your entrance. An eye-catching entrance can draw customers to your door even when they know nothing about your business.
- Use your transition zone. Ensure that your store's transition zone is designed in a way that not only drives sales, but gives a good overall impression of your store as your customers enter.
- Use window and exterior signage effectively. Make sure enticing products are placed somewhere that they can be seen by potential customers as they pass by the store windows. You should also keep your window displays fresh. If your display never changes, people will quickly stop noticing it.

## 2. The Transition Zone

The transition zone (*also known as the decompression zone*) of your store is the first place your customers step into upon entering and typically comprises the first five to fifteen feet of space depending on the size of your store.

- Upon entering a store, customers need an area to adjust and feel comfortable. Keeping this area relatively free of obstructions will allow your customers a faster transition and give you an opportunity to direct their attention to an area or particular products of your choosing.
- As they adjust to their new environment a customer typically doesn't notice merchandise within 15 feet of an entrance. So placing merchandise in your transition zone generally isn't a good idea.
- Customers will also make critical judgements on your store from this location. At a glance they will be making decisions about your pricing, the quality of your merchandise, and what to expect from your employees. Use interior design with your branding in mind to make a good first impression.
- Speed bumps. Providing a zone for your customers to adjust to your space is important, but equally important is to then slow them down once they're acclimated. An eye-catching display placed at the edge of your transition zone can act as an attention grabber, slowing down your customers so they notice other products.

### 3. Choose a Suitable Layout

Research has show that 90% of North American consumers will unconsciously turn to the right upon entering a store. What are you offering them as they make this turn? This behaviour provides you with the perfect opportunity to make a good impression with your merchandise, so think carefully about what product or information would be most useful in this area. Regular merchandise in this space is wasted potential - think high-demand, new, and seasonal items.

Once they've made this right turn the layout of your store should act as a guide, directing your customers down a path and through an experience of your choosing. Lead your customers deeper into your store with strategically placed displays, signage, and product offerings. Identify your customer's behaviour and your particular product offerings to help determine a store layout that will work best for you.

**Layout types:**



**GRID:**

Sends customers in, around, and up-and-down aisles



**LOOP:**

Central grouping of displays with circular or square path



**FREE FLOW:**

Allows merchants to direct travel and encourage impulse buying

### 4. Minimize Counters

Modern retail spaces are more open in general and the trend is moving towards reducing the use of counters wherever possible within a store.

- In Retail 2.0 the focus is on customer experience, rather than simply the product on the shelves.
- Counters separate employees from customers and creates an us-vs-them dynamic which subtly undermines the customer experience.
- Where counters are necessary like checkouts, keep the size and height of the counters to a minimum to further connect your staff with your customers.

## 5. Beware the Butt-Brush!

Modern retail spaces are more open by design and providing your customers with wide, clear aisles will improve their overall experience in your store.

- A typical customer will actually avoid merchandise if it means potentially brushing up against another customer in the same aisle. This even holds true when it is merchandise the customer is interested in, so it has a strong effect.
- Allowing adequate personal space in aisles and other store areas will eliminate this issue, while also improving visibility throughout your store.

## 6. Slow Them Down

Giving careful thought to the traffic flow and path that you've designed for you customers should give you insight as to where you could use speed bumps in your store.

- Slowing your customers down will make sure your merchandising and promotional efforts pay off by grabbing their attention and directing them to the products you are trying to sell.
- Consider displays with products that compliment each other from your customer's perspective. This improves their shopping experience and creates the opportunity to make a sale on the additional merchandise.
- Keep it fresh. Update your displays regularly to create a sense of novelty with your repeat customers. Displays that don't change often will quickly be ignored by regular visitors.
- Seating is another great way to slow your customers down. Although not appropriate in all environments, a comfortable seating area can give your customer a moment to relax and also direct their attention to various displays or product offerings. Consider digital signage in these areas to deliver information to a captive audience.

## 7. Good Visibility

Good visibility throughout your store has benefits to you and the customer.

- A more open environment with good visibility makes your customers more comfortable since they are more aware of their surroundings.
- Good visibility also reduces inventory loss by ensuring that you and your employees can keep a eye on merchandise in all areas of your store.
- Visibility and loss reduction should always be taken into consideration for the placement of temporary displays.

## 8. Checkout

The checkout is the final stop on the path that you have designed for you customers. It should be located at a natural stopping point in the shopping experience you've created.

- If 90% of customers are turning right upon entering a store and continue in a counter-clockwise direction, then the natural location for the checkout would be on the left near the front of the store.
- Every space has its own requirements. Which is why putting serious thought into traffic flow is important and can lead you to insights, like the optimal place for a checkout.
- Do you have a single employee store? If so, ensure that the checkout has a clear view of the store for loss prevention.
- Design your checkout to sell. Utilize the space behind your checkout counter to its fullest potential by creating an engaging display of product. Don't forget to stock impulse buy items in a location with maximum visibility to customers who are checking out.
- Never miss a chance to engage with your customers. Use the opportunity to thank them and ensure they found everything they were looking for.
- Make sure you have clear and friendly signage for exchanges and refund policies.

## Design in the Retail Space

Good design is more than just appearance and beyond the layout of your store, interior design has a critical role to play in improving your customer's experience and driving sales. The first thing customers notice after entering your store is the interior design and décor. With the design of your store, you can create a more immersive experience for your customers, with elements - walls, flooring, colours, fixtures, and signage all working together to tell a single story. Clever design elements can be used to open up small spaces, invite customers in, and influence traffic flow.

### Brand Considerations

What is your brand? All aspects of your store's interior design should be influenced by your brand. As simple as the colours on the wall or as complex as the feeling elicited by your customers upon walking through your door. To get a clearer picture of what your brand is and how to express that, consider these questions:

- What is your company's message to your customers? Convenience? Well-being? Luxury?
- Who is your customer? What are their goals and what barriers exist to achieving those goals? Most importantly - What is your role in eliminating those barriers?
- What environment best fits your brand message. Modern? Traditional? Country?
- Do you have existing logos or colours that should be represented?

Your brand is both the roll you play in the retail space and the experience you provide to your customers. So how can you use design to further enhance that experience? Consistency is key, with a clear vision of what your business represents and who it serves.

### Interior Design Elements

There are a number of interior design techniques that can have dramatic impacts on your store. Depending on your needs understanding these techniques will provide you tools for, calling attention to products, making the most of a smaller space, and making your customers feel comfortable, to name a few. Here are a few tips for making the most of your interior space.

## Accent Walls

- There are two kinds of colours you should be considering for your store - Primary neutral colours and secondary accent colours. The primary colours should be used in the majority of your space to create a comfortable atmosphere, while the accent colours can be used to direct attention to product offerings where needed.
- Be consistent with accent colours, and if possible choose a brand colour.
- In smaller spaces, a well-chosen accent colour can also push walls back visually, creating the illusion of a larger space.

## Create Windows

- Whether they are real or simulated, windows open up spaces and make them seem larger than they are. If a window isn't appropriate, a simple opening in a divider wall or interior wall can have the same effect.
- A well placed mirror will also open up a space at a fraction of the cost of cutting an opening for a window.
- Curtains hung around the mirror or wall opening completes the effect and can provide another level of texture to your space.

## Think Vertical

- Using the available vertical space in your store is another effective strategy for dealing with a small space.
- Even in larger environments, displaying items on different levels maximizes the wall space available to you and like accent walls, is also very effective for drawing attention to product offerings.
- But remember to keep high-demand products near eye level as those will be the first thing most customers see.

## Lighting

- Often under-utilized, lighting design can drastically change the look and feel of a space.
- Good lighting design is critical in small spaces as dark corners of rooms will make a space seem even smaller. Darker areas in your store will also discourage your customers from entering those areas.
- Lighting is a powerful tool for drawing attention to areas and leading customers through your store. Consider installing adjustable spotlights so you can modify how areas are lit depending on store layout and product offerings.